

This Sunday's texts:

[Isaiah 55:10-13](#)

[Romans 8:12-17](#)

[Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23](#)

## **Children of God**

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**July 16, 2023**

The Gospel reading for this morning from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 13, starting in verse 1:

<sup>1</sup>That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. <sup>2</sup>Such large crowds gathered around Him that He got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. <sup>3</sup>Then He told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup>As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup>Some fell on rocky places, where it didn't have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil is shallow. <sup>6</sup>But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup>Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. <sup>8</sup>Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown. <sup>9</sup>Whoever has ears, let them hear." ... <sup>18</sup>"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: <sup>19</sup>When anyone hears the Message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. <sup>20</sup>The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the Word and at once receives it with joy. <sup>21</sup>But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the Word, they quickly fall away. <sup>22</sup>The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the Word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the Word, making it unfruitful. <sup>23</sup>But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the Word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown."

This Is the Word of our Lord. Thanks be to God. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, You are good; You are loving; and You call us Your children. Lord, Your spirit in us confirms that we are indeed children of God. So we open up our hearts and our minds this morning to be touched by Your Word, knowing with confidence that Your word goes out and it does not return without doing what Your purpose is for it. So, Lord, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Today we're continuing our series working through the book of Romans that we're calling *Living with the Spirit's Presence*. We're seeing here in the letter

to the Romans the implications that being filled with the Holy Spirit have for God's people. We live a way of life, not by the law, but by the Holy Spirit. We have a new identity, not based on what we've done, but grounded on the firm foundation of what Christ has done for us.

Today, we continue in this series and we come to a passage that, much like Pastor Jim looked at last week, explores questions of identity: Who am I? Who is God? Why does it matter? I love what Pastor Jim shared last week this beautiful gospel message. Through Christ, our identity isn't "I am a sinner," but as we look at our sin, as we examine the sinfulness in our own lives, it reminds us of our true identity in Christ which is "I am forgiven."

Today our text builds on that. Romans 8 says this. "The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship ... the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God."<sup>1</sup> You are not a slave to fear in this life. You're a child of God. A simple message but a powerful one. Let's jump in.

Verse 15 says, "The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again." That word "again" right there, suggests to the original audience and to us that the life before or without Christ is a life that is governed by fear. I think that is a profoundly true statement. As we look around at the world that we live in, we see so much fear. For us, even as we live in Christ, the challenge is that old habits can die hard. Sometimes that "slave to fear" mentality stays long past its welcome.

During Lent this year, during our Lenten services, we had people share testimonies from their own personal lives of what God has done in their lives. In one of those testimonies, someone shared a thought that has stuck with me ever since. He said, "It took 40 days to get God's people out of Egypt, but 40 years to get Egypt out of God's people." They had been delivered from slavery and sin in Egypt and yet it took 40 years of wilderness to prepare that people for the Promised Land, to live not as slaves, but as the free and unburdened and deeply loved children of God.

Though we are children of God, the ways of the world can linger in our lives and we live in a culture that in many ways is governed and driven by fear. It motivates the choices that many people make. We make decisions based on the fear of what other people might think of us, that we may say the right things and not the wrong ones, the fear of failure, the fear of rejection, the fear of loss, the

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:15; 16

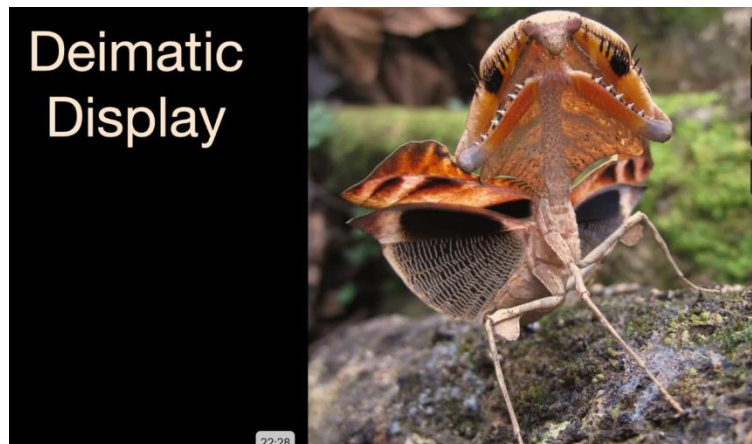
fear of missing out on something better, the fear of death, and judgment. All of these things impact the ways that people live their lives. I want you to think for a second here today and you can even write it down if you want. **Where is fear exercising control in your life?** Let that question sit for a second.

Now I want to take a detour. I'm going to talk about biology a little bit. We'll get back to it. We're going to talk biology for a second and in particular, animal defense mechanisms. Seems like it's good of a time as any, right? Now you're probably aware of this idea even if you don't know it by the name of something called Aposematic Display. It's something you see in animals like a

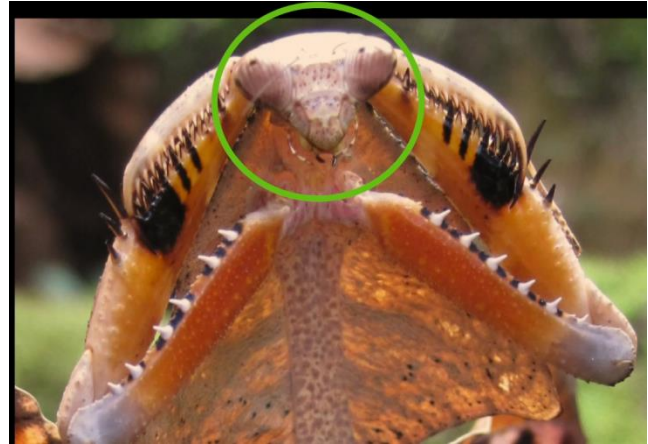
poison dart frog or the blue-ringed octopus. It's bright, intense, flamboyant colors in animals that, by making them stick out from their environment; it suggests "I am poisonous. I am dangerous. Do not come near me. I don't even need to hide because I am such a problem for you. That look at me. Stay away." It's an Aposematic Display. It's called aposematism and it's to say "Look out because I am actually dangerous. So much so that I have no need to move around in secret."



Now there's something else that occurs in nature. It's very similar in some ways but it is substantially different in others. This is called Deimatic Display. They're similar at face value - flashy displays and gestures with the intent of communicating the message "I am scary and dangerous." like this guy right here. That nice intense toothy lizard, right? You see his eyes there and that menacing toothy grin. Or is it?



Zoom in a little bit. There's the head of the dead leaf mantis, pretending to look like this big scary lizard to say "Stay away from me, predators. I am scary." He's even got those little fake eyes and that nasty little toothy grin. This behavior pattern is meant to scare away predators that he is actually completely powerless against.



So Pastor Joe, why the biology lesson? The power that fear holds in the Christian life is false power. It's a deimatic display, a fake intimidating toothy grin, scary and startling, but in reality, it is toothless and weak - no real problem for the Christian at all. Fear has no power over you because your heavenly Father loves you with a perfect love. That love drives out all fear.

So I'm going to say with confidence today that you have not received a spirit of fear, but rather by faith in Christ, a different kind of spirit is already yours. It's already in you. Not the spirit of fear that exercises ruthless control over people's lives, waving scarcity, rejection, and failure in your face, but rather the Spirit we receive brought about your adoption to sonship. "And by Him, we cry 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."<sup>2</sup> You've received the spirit not of fear, but of God's power, in the spirit of sonship, the spirit which Romans 8:11 says is the very power that "raised Christ from the dead," live and at work in your life.

This Spirit confirms that you are a child of God. So what does it mean to be a child of God? You've received the spirit of adoption, of sonship to the Creator of the universe, the King of all creation, and the spirit of fear has no jurisdiction in the household of God.

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:15-16

It's kind of like this. In 1961, John F Kennedy was elected the 35th President of the United States. At the time he took office, he had an 8-week-old son named John Jr, affectionately known as John John. I love that. John John spent most of his first three years of life living in the White House. He was sort of known for having a bit of free rein in Daddy's office. You can see he is there crouched underneath the desk in the Oval Office as Dad worked. I love this picture. You don't get to do this unless Daddy is President, right? JFK was the President of every American, but only the children get to crawl under the desk in the Oval Office. It's intimacy. It's love. It's relationship.



I think a lot of Christians have an easy time thinking of God as king. He's strong. He's mighty. He lays down the Law. He's in charge. But we can also conceive of the King as far away, of somewhere else. He's ruling on a throne somewhere, but He's not close. I think sometimes we have a harder time thinking of God as Father, that He loves us with an unconditional love. Our shortcomings and failings do not diminish His love for us. He knows us and wants to be known by us. And because of Christ, we can, as Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us approach God's throne of grace with confidence."



I love this picture of John John because it reminds me that God is both my King and my Father. I can approach Him with confidence and without fear because He loves me. He's my heavenly Father, my Abba, and He's yours too.

The spirit that is in you is not the spirit of fear. You might have fear sometimes, but that's not who you are. You can have confidence because who you are is a child of God and an heir of the Kingdom. And because this is true, fear does not have to direct or lead your life. You can trust that even in the face of fear and the face of the unknown that you are not alone because the Spirit of God is in you. Fear has false power. It's a deimatic display. The Spirit of God has real power. It's the power to lead, the power to guide us, to teach us, to comfort us when we

suffer, to work miracles. It is the deposit that God has given us that reminds us that our eternity is firm and secure in the hands of a strong and loving Father. It is the power that brings the dead back to life. And if you are a child of God, then that is the spirit that is in you. You're not the passenger in a car driven by fear, but of one driven by the Holy Spirit. So you don't need to live with a scarcity mindset that's afraid that there's not enough to go around and I better cling to what I have because what if I lose it, because in the kingdom of God and as His Heir, there is always enough at His table. You don't have to fear the rejection of others not because it doesn't happen sometimes. Rejection is real, but because you can know that you have already been accepted by the heavenly Father. You don't need to fear the end because according to the promises of God, it is just the beginning of something even greater.

So let's come back to the question I asked earlier. Child of God, are there things in your life today that are being led by fear, rather than the Holy Spirit? Surrender them to God, to your Abba. He cares for you. He loves you and He is mighty to save. Lay them at His feet. Ask Him to lead you and guide you in them. Say "Heavenly Father, what would You have me do?" You may be clinging to control, guided by fear and He wants you to let go and trust Him. You may be holding back your words for fear of rejection and He says "Trust Me and I will give you the words to say." You may be clinging to the past and He is saying "Trust that I have something better for you in the future."

Here's what I've found in my life when I do. When I lay down those situations that are governed by fear, here's what I've seen. When I ask God to guide my life, to lead me by His Spirit, He does it because he promised He would do it. When you say "God, what is it that You have for me today? What is it You want me to let go of, so I can take hold of something better? What is Your Holy Spirit up to in my life and in this moment?" You know what the answer often seems to be: "Come and see." So children of God, do not be afraid to "come and see" what your heavenly Father can do in and through you, as you are led by his spirit. Amen.